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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses implications of ability grouping in elementary reading instruction according to current research, and how such research can be applied to the classroom practice of "guided reading" within a balanced literacy program. The paper suggests that the "balanced literacy" approach from New Zealand is basically the same as whole language with the added component of guided reading, in which students are placed in homogeneous ability groups. The paper discusses definitions; presents a history of the balanced literacy approach and ability grouping in reading instruction; addresses issues, controversies, programs, and contributors; and offers a synthesis and analysis of existing research. The paper concludes that (1) there is not adequate evidence to apply all of the findings of research on ability grouping in traditional classrooms to the type of ability grouping in traditional classrooms; (2) the balanced literacy approach appears to be in line with whole language philosophies; (3) implementation of a balanced literacy program takes a large portion of the instructional day and involves risks for teachers and students. Recommendations in the paper include: teachers need to prioritize literacy; content areas should be integrated into the balanced literacy classroom; administrators should establish inservice training in the balanced literacy approach; and future researchers should conduct both quantitative and qualitative research on specific effects of ability grouping within a balanced literacy classroom. Contains 93 references. Appendixes present suggested teaching sequences, a framework for literacy learning, descriptions of work areas in a learning to read classroom, an example of a running record, and a daily schedule. (RS)

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ED 380 783

Ability Grouping for Elementary Reading Instruction and its Relationship to the Balanced Literacy Approach

Lorie L. Strech

March 30, 1995

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According to the English-Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools (California Department of Education, 1987, p. 1), education is currently "in the midst of a revolution - a quiet, intellectual revolution spinning out dramatic insights into how the brain works, how we acquire language, and how we construct meaning." This knowledge, which is based on current research in education and psychology, poses to educators the challenge of redirecting the goals and practices surrounding the language arts curriculum. The English-Language Arts Framework proposes a language arts curriculum that is literature based, meaning centered, views writing as a process, and integrates the four modes of communication (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).

Although strong relationships exist between the modes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (California State Department of Education, 1987; Mooney, 1990; Myers, 1993), the focus of this paper will be reading. This focus was chosen in light of the impending implementation of a balanced literacy approach (Batzle, 1994; Davidson, 1990; Wright Group, 1994) in the author's school. In order to comprehend the rationale and context for this research, it is crucial to first understand the school demographics and current instructional practices.

The author's school, which is located approximately 15 miles southeast of Los Angeles, California, has an enrollment of approximately 730 students in kindergarten through grade five. About 36% of the school population receives Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). In addition, approximately 85% of students receive free or reduced-price lunches. Three of every four students live in apartments. This contributes to an annual transiency rate exceeding 50%.

The school setting contains a diverse ethnic population. The majority of students are of Hispanic origin (60.66%). African American and Caucasian students represent 14.73% and 18.03% of the student population, respectively. Other ethnic groups represented include Native American, Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander.

Reading instruction at the author's school, in recent years, has been based on whole language principles proposed by Kenneth Goodman (1986). Students are encouraged to make meaning of text and to respond to literature in a variety of meaningful ways. Phonics is taught in the context of authentic reading experiences. However, reading experiences are commonly built around grade-level core literary works which are too difficult for many of students to read at an instructional level. In addition, much of the reading instruction is conducted in a whole class setting (without breaking the students into smaller groups). This type of whole language classroom in which teachers rarely instruct students in small groups was the norm among whole language classrooms studied by Hiebert and Fisher (1990).

Standardized test scores at the school have declined dramatically in the past years. One factor that may contribute to the decline is the incompatibility of the whole language instruction and the multiple choice tests which, according to It's Elementary!: Elementary Grades Task Force Report (California Department of Education, 1992, p.65), "have tended to put a premium on rudimentary academic skills." Two recent educational publications which call for reform in elementary education, Smart Start: Elementary Education for the 21st Century (Barth & Mitchell, 1994) and It's Elementary!: Elementary Grades Task Force Report (California

Department of Education, 1992), question the validity of standardized tests in assessing the ability of children to construct meaning as readers.

Although the validity of the school's standardized test scores are in question, teachers are extremely concerned about the reading ability of students. Many students demonstrate reading abilities which are below grade level in individual classroom reading assessments. Many teachers partially attribute low reading ability to the low socioeconomic level, language differences, transiency, attendance, and parental involvement. These factors are often related to a lower level of academic performance (Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 1994) . However, there are case studies which demonstrate that schools with the majority of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds can succeed in producing students who can succeed academically (Ramirez-Smith, 1995; Vickery, 1988) According to Barth and Mitchell (1994, p. 7), "...schools must be designed so that children will learn no matter what they bring or do not bring from their family background."

As the balanced literacy approach (which originated in New Zealand schools) began to increase in prominence in the United States, the teachers at the author's school began to reflect upon the deficiencies in the current practice based solely on an interpretation of whole language principles. Although it was concurred that whole language principles are valuable to classroom practice, students, on the whole, were not reading at desirable levels. The teachers reached a consensus regarding the need to enhance whole language instruction. This led to the investigation of the components of a balanced literacy program.

One component of balanced literacy, guided reading, was lacking in the whole language classrooms. Guided reading (Davidson, 1990; Mooney,

1990; Wright Group, 1994) is the matching of children to text appropriate for their developmental reading level. Students are placed in small, homogeneous ability groups for the guided reading component of the program. Hence, the issue of ability grouping arose as the implementation of balanced literacy was discussed. Ability grouping in reading instruction has traditionally been a controversial issue in education (Slavin, 1987a). Since the majority of the other components of balanced literacy (which are similar, if not synonymous, to whole language strategies) are already in place in many classrooms, the specific focus of this paper will be ability grouping as it relates to the balanced literacy approach.

The issue of ability grouping in elementary reading instruction is crucial to educators and educational researchers. It extends into the secondary school through its effects on the early academic development of students. The implications of this practice in the elementary school affect the cognitive and affective development of the nation's children. This has a direct bearing on the future state of society.

The issue of ability grouping in the context of balanced literacy is timely as the balanced literacy approach is adopted by more elementary schools in the United States. A relationship between the research on traditional ability grouping and ability grouping within a balanced literacy program needs to be established.

The issue of ability grouping, within the context of reading instruction, relates to numerous other fields of social science. P. David Pearson (1992, p. 1075) describes the interdisciplinary nature of reading research within the broader context of literacy research by stating, "Perhaps no other educational phenomenon has been studied by so many disciplines."

The field of linguistics has produced much research concerning the role of language acquisition in reading. The fields of psychology and sociology have studied the effects of ability grouping on children as well as contributing research involving broader topics within the area of reading in the elementary school. In addition, reading research has been influenced by sociolinguists, historians, and critical theorists (Pearson, 1992).

The broader issue of literacy instruction is critical in the context of the global society that is emerging. According to Lester Thurow (1995), esteemed scholar in the field of economics, the manifestation of a world economy in recent years has brought to light the true position of the United States in relation to other countries in the world. Because of its rich agricultural land and abundant natural resources, the United States has historically been viewed as the dominant world leader. However, several key changes in the world have left the United States in a weaker position in relation to industry and education. According to Thurow, the recent end of Communism, shifts in technology, the rise of a global economy, shifts in democracy and migration, and the lack of one dominant world power are major events which invoked this change in world society and economy.

In the midst of this world evolution, the quality of education in the United States comes into question. While the world is changing rapidly, the educational system in the United States is not. Education in the United States fifty years ago was successful in producing the type of workers needed to maintain a lead in the global market. However, the same type of education is not adequate for today's needs in the work force. If the United States is going to compete with other nations, education must be reformed to produce the type of workers needed in today's economy. Literacy

instruction needs to be consistent with the goals of producing students who are critical thinkers, prolific communicators, and cooperative workers.

Practices within literacy programs, such as in the balanced literacy approach from New Zealand, need to be evaluated in the context of the changing needs of the world today. Information about successes of educational practices in other countries can serve to improve and enrich the state of education in the United States. According to Don Holdaway (1984,p.x), "The profession of teaching is rapidly becoming an *international* fraternity." In light of this statement, it is apparent that the implications of global trade reach farther than the provision of goods and services.

All in all, this author believes that there is adequate evidence to support the need for educators and researchers to address the issue of ability grouping for reading instruction in the elementary school as it relates to the balanced literacy approach.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of this paper is twofold. The first question that this paper will address is: **What are the implications of ability grouping in elementary reading instruction according to current research?** Before a thorough analysis of the guided reading component of the balanced literacy approach can be made, a comprehensive understanding of ability grouping must be reached. Academic outcomes and student effects of ability grouping must be examined. This need to understand the implications of grouping is supported by Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, and Stluka (1994) and Slavin (1987a).

The second question this paper will attempt to answer is: **How can the research dealing with ability grouping in elementary reading instruction be applied to the classroom practice of guided reading within a balanced literacy program?** Current research will provide a frame of reference for the evaluation of the balanced literacy approach advocated by Batzle (1994), Davidson (1990), Mooney (1990), and Wright Group (1994).

Definitions

This section will define several terms essential for understanding the research concerning ability grouping and the literature concerning the balanced literacy approach to teaching reading.

Reading

"...the ability to map print to language, decoding..."

(Perfetti, 1994, p.4942)

> "Reading is the sharing of meaning. It is interaction between the giver and the receiver. Reading is the creation and recreation of meaning; and it takes place through the nonverbal as well as verbal modes of language-through listening and speaking, reading and writing, moving and watching, shaping and viewing. Reading is not merely a curriculum subject able to be confined to any one period, for reading is part of any exchange of meaning through text."
>
> (Mooney, 1990, p.2-3)

The definitions by Perfetti and Mooney provide a startling contrast in defining of the act of reading. They were chosen from the many definitions because of their polarity. These two definitions could be positioned at opposite ends of the "skill versus process" continuum of definitions of reading.

Perfetti's definition is very scientific and sterile, while Mooney's definition attributes a holistic quality to the reading process. The definition used for the purpose of this paper is Mooney's. Although Perfetti's definition can be viewed as one descriptor of reading behavior, this author

believes it omits the holistic processes that occur in the reading development of an elementary school student.

Ability Grouping

"Grouping students for instruction by ability or achievement to create homogeneous instructional groups."

(Morgan, 1989, p.2)

"...some means of grouping students for instruction by ability or achievement so as to reduce their heterogeneity."

(Slavin, 1987a, p.294)

"...the grouping of students of similar academic abilities..."

(California Department of Education, 1992, p.33)

Within-Class Ability Grouping

[also called intraclass grouping (Young, 1990)]

"...the practice of assigning students to homogeneous subgroups for instruction within the class. In general, each subgroup receives instruction at its own level and is allowed to progress at its own rate." (Slavin, 1987b, p.117)

Between-Class Ability Grouping

[also called interclass grouping (Young, 1990)]

"...school-level arrangements by which students are assigned to classes." (Slavin, 1987b, p.111)

There are several types of between-class grouping defined by Robert Slavin (1987b).

For Class Assignment

The assignment of students to "self-contained classes on the basis of a general achievement or ability measure." (p.112)

For Selected Subjects Within Grade Level

"Another...ability grouping arrangement involves having students remain in heterogeneous classes most of the day, but regrouping for selected subjects." (p.113)

For Selected Subjects Across Grade Levels

[also called the Joplin Plan when referring to reading instruction]

"Students are regrouped for reading without regard for grade levels." (p.113-114)

The definitions relating to ability grouping can be classified according to definitions concerning the determinants of group membership and definitions concerning the organizational structure of groupings.

The general definitions set forth by Morgan, Slavin, and the California Department of Education state the basis by which groups are formed for instruction. Both Morgan and Slavin refer to ability and achievement as determinants for group membership, whereas the California Department of Education excludes the term achievement in its definition. This may connote that children of different levels of reading achievement (more linked to effort) may be grouped together according to reading ability (more linked to cognitive skills).

All three general definitions of ability grouping use terms to indicate a degree of uniformity within the group. The California Department of Education uses the term "similar" while Morgan and Slavin use "homogeneous" and "reduce...heterogeneity", respectively.

The definitions which characterize the organization of groups can be categorized by within-class grouping and between-class grouping structures. The basic practice of within-class ability grouping for reading instruction is a microcosm of the larger scope of between-class grouping. As with within-class grouping, between-class grouping involves groups of students which receive instruction at their level and progress independently of other groups. Between-class grouping, however, offers several choices of organization. Students can be assigned to a specific classroom according to ability for all or part of the day. Classroom assignment solely for reading instruction can be made within one grade level or across grade levels (as in the Joplin Plan).

Whereas the ways of organizing the groups differ, the definitions themselves regarding organization describe a concrete description of events and therefore, do not connote contrasting concepts within the same organizational structure. The type of ability grouping referred to in this

paper, due to its relationship to guided reading component of a balanced literacy program, is the within-class grouping.

Whole Language

> "...a way of bringing together a view of language, a view of learning, and a view of people..." (Goodman, 1986, p.5)

> "Whole language learning builds around whole learners learning whole language in whole situations. The focus is on meaning and not on language itself, in authentic speech and literacy events." (Goodman, 1986, p.40)

> Whole language "defines language broadly...It is based on close observation of the way in which language acquisition occurs and assumes the best way to acquire language is through real usage." (Myers, 1993, p.12-13)

> "Whole language is a comprehensive philosophy involving teaching, learning, and the use of language in the classroom...Whole language instruction places emphasis on the process of reading rather than on an accumulation of skills." (Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, & Rubel, 1993, p.94)

According to John Myers (1993), definitions of whole language can be categorized by those pertaining to philosophy and those pertaining to practice. The definition given by Kenneth Goodman is taken from his book What's Whole in Whole Language? (1986). The brief definition

given can be classified as philosophy, however, Goodman deals extensively with practice in his book. The definition by Myers can also be classified as philosophy. The definition by Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, and Rubel labels whole language as a comprehensive philosophy but does not present the basic tenets of the philosophy. According to Frank Smith (1992, p.440), the "original philosophy of whole language, even before it acquired the label, had nothing to do with methods, materials, or techniques." It is logical to begin with the philosophy and allow philosophy to guide practice (Myers, 1993).

The definitions by Myers and Goodman are similar in their presentation of language for authentic purposes. Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, and Rubel specifically mention practice by using the term "instruction" and describe whole language instruction in its focus on holistic processes rather than isolated skills. The definition used for the purpose of this paper is the philosophic view of Kenneth Goodman. Specific practices within a whole language classroom, as they relate to the balanced literacy approach, will be discussed within subsequent sections of this paper.

Balanced Literacy

(this term is used interchangeably to describe both an approach and a program)

> "A balanced literacy program will include a wide range of reading and writing experiences, including reading ***to*** children, reading ***with*** children, and reading ***by*** children. The skills of literacy are developed, practiced and reinforced in the context of actual reading." (Rigby, 1989, p.3)

According to Janine Batzle (1994) a balanced literacy program is a "framework for literacy learning (p.17)" which includes the following components: Reading Aloud (reading to children), Shared Reading (reading with children), Guided Reading (reading by children), Independent Reading (reading by children), Responses, Shared Writing, Modeled Writing, Language Experience, and Children's Writing.

The Wright Group (1994) describes the same approach with the term "balanced language" program. A balanced language program includes: Reading Aloud to Children, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Paired Reading, Independent Reading, Language Exploration, Process Writing, Language Games, Structure Writing, Content Writing, The Daily News, and Language Catalysts.

All three of the definitions for balanced literacy include reading to, with, and by children. The definition by Rigby links the balanced literacy perspective to the whole language philosophy in its mention of literacy skills being learned in context. The definitions by Batzle and Wright Group do not describe the philosophy behind balanced literacy, but merely lists components of it. The definitions of balanced literacy used for the purpose of this paper are Rigby's (due to its mention of the philosophy behind the approach) and Batzle's (specific components of the program).

In comparing Rigby's definition of balanced literacy to Kenneth Goodman's definition of whole language, there appears to be a parallel in philosophy. Balanced literacy is also built around meaningful reading. However, balanced literacy specifically includes a form of ability grouping

(the guided reading component) while Goodman (1986) asserts that teachers should move away from ability grouping for reading instruction. The issue of the relationship between balanced literacy and whole language will be explored in depth in subsequent sections of this paper.

Guided Reading

"In guided reading there is a careful match of text and children to ensure that each child in the group (usually six to eight children) is able to enjoy and control the story throughout the first reading. This means that groups are relatively homogeneous. Although the children in any one group will reflect a range of competencies, experiences, and interests they will be working together at that particular time because the material offers each child a manageable amount of challenge." (Mooney, 1990, p.45)

"Guided Reading provides the opportunity for the teacher to work with small groups of children on books that present a successful challenge for the children." (Davidson, 1990, p.27)

"Children who have reached similar stages of reading development work closely with the teacher in a small group of no more than eight. Each child is in the role of a reader, with his or her own copy of the selected book. The book will have been carefully chosen to be supportive, predictable, and closely matched to children's abilities, needs, and interests." (Rigby, 1989, p.4-5)

"Guided Reading is an approach that enables a teacher and a group of children to think about, talk about, and then read a book purposefully together." (Wright Group, 1994, p.6)

"Guided reading provides an opportunity for readers to utilize, develop and further reading strategies by working at the edge of their development. The teacher guides a group of readers with similar abilities to a successful experience with the text." (Batzle, 1994, p.18)

There are several commonalties among the different definitions of guided reading. The definitions by Mooney, Davidson, Rigby, and Batzle connote a matching of child to text in order to provide a challenge in which the student will experience success.

The definitions by Batzle and Mooney describe the group as "homogeneous" and as having children with "similar abilities", while the definition by Davidson and the definition by Wright Group do not refer to the determinants for group membership. It is assumed that children are grouped by ability if every child is matched to the text according to his or her developmental reading level. Perhaps the omission of direct reference to ability grouping is due to the fact that ability grouping has traditionally been a controversial subject (Slavin, 1987a) and Davidson (whose definition appears in the teachers' guide to the Rigby program) and The Wright Group are not research entities, but publishers who are trying to market their products. The definition used for the purpose of this paper is that of Margaret Mooney.

A suggested format for a guided reading lesson is presented in Appendix A (Davidson, 1990). It involves focusing children's attention on details within the text in order to help each child in his or her construction of meaning as he or she reads the text independently. During the guided reading session, students are involved in sampling, predicting, checking, and confirming the meaning of the text (See Appendix B). Guided reading emphasizes the derivation of meaning from a text.

History of the Balanced Literacy Approach and Ability Grouping in Reading Instruction

The balanced literacy approach has its roots in the whole language movement in New Zealand in the 1980s. The process of its inception came about as a result of the abandonment and/or refinement of several historical approaches to teaching reading. According to Don Holdaway (1979), a former teacher in New Zealand who authored several landmark books relating to the balanced literacy components, there has historically been opposing methodologies in teaching reading. During the early part of the century, the debate between the alphabetic approach (children spelled out single unknown words letter by letter, using the letter names, before attempting to say them) and the phonetic approach (children sounded each letter out, using sound associations, in order to say an unknown word) raged. The result was an emphasis on oral accuracy without attention to the creation of meaning.

Later, yet still in the early part of the century, the findings of Gestalt psychologists led to the inception of the "whole word" approach, also known as the look-and-say approach. This approach, which is based on the idea that individuals recognize whole words by sight instead of analyzing letters, stood contrary to the phonetic approach. During this era, many reading materials were published which, according to Holdaway (1979, p.28) "lacked literary worth or interest, and destroyed natural language-use-whether they were phonetic readers or look-and-say readers."

The whole word versus sentence debate began as a result of the insight that the sentence is the smallest meaningful unit of a language. The sentence methodology brought about a focus on context clues and natural

language processes, however, it did not attend to visual clues and other basic reading skills.

In response to the limitations in the different methodologies, educators began to adopt practices from several different approaches in order to create an eclectic program which meets individual needs of children. The eclectic approach, although a breakthrough in practice, "lacked consistency and coherence (Holdaway, 1979, p.30)". The result was chaos in instructional practices.

During the 1950s, scholars worked with publishing companies in the United States to produce detailed basal reading programs which presented "eclectic approaches in a coherent and systematic bundle (Holdaway, 1979, p.30)." The basal programs, according to Holdaway (1979), improved the state of reading instruction at that time.

The basal programs became widely used in elementary classrooms throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. As new findings were published by reading experts, the basal readers were expanded in an effort to maintain the appearance of soundness in relation to research. According to Goodman et al. (1988, p.22), "...as new skills, periods of development, and theories were discovered, basal publishers could claim their revisions supplied additional information and materials to help teachers follow scientific developments." Goodman et al. (1988) point out that the development of basal reading programs parallels the development of knowledge in the field due to the fact that most of the reading experts in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s worked for basal publishing companies.

According the Goodman et al. (1988, p.1), basal programs claim to "teach all children to read regardless of teacher competence and regardless of learner differences." This reliance on a structured sequence of skills,

controlled vocabulary, and the lack of provision for the professional judgment of teachers contributed to a dissatisfaction with basals and a trend towards literature-based instruction in the 1980s. This trend towards literature-based instruction is a result of the whole language movement (Goodman, 1986; Routman, 1991).

As the whole language movement blossomed in New Zealand, the government established whole language practices as the policy for literacy instruction (Goodman, 1986). The national government, which is the single authority for education, adopted the "Ready to Read" series (a series of titles written by local authors, New Zealand Department of Education, 1983) and encouraged teachers to use it as core materials. However, the teachers were trained in a philosophy of literacy that encouraged using a variety of materials to reflect the principles of the whole language philosophy. The resulting experiences in the whole language classrooms in New Zealand led to a balanced literacy approach to reading summarized by the phrase "reading to, with, and by children (Mooney, 1990)." This approach employed a variety of grouping strategies, including homogeneous grouping for guided reading.

It is important to comprehend the history of the research and practice concerning ability grouping in general in order to understand current issues within the context of grouping for elementary reading instruction. Research and practice from the late 1800s to the 1980s will be utilized to examine and discuss ability grouping.

According to Herbert Thelen (1967, p.23), "Homogeneous ability grouping has a long history, both as a practice and an object of research." Research in this area, for the most part, has traditionally been inconclusive. Reviews of research from the 1920s to the 1960s consistently demonstrate

inconsistency among research findings. One of the earliest reviews of research was published in 1929 by Rock. He concluded that "The experimental studies of grouping which have been considered fail to show consistent, statistically or educationally significant differences between the achievement of pupils in homogeneous groups and pupils of equal ability in heterogeneous groups. This failure to realize one of the important advantages claimed for ability grouping is not, however, evidence that homogeneous grouping cannot result in increased academic achievement. Neither do the experiments show that other claims made for grouping cannot be attained under proper organization. There was practically unanimous agreement found among the teachers involved in the studies, that the teaching situation was improved by the homogeneous grouping (Rock, 1929, p.125)".

Critical analyses of research published in the 1930s continued to uphold the inconclusive nature of the research. While there were studies that indicated positive effects (such as an increase in student motivation and the reduction of failure), there was not agreement between the studies on the exact nature and conditions of the positive effects. A summary of the research written by Otto in 1941 indicated the existence of more positive effects (such as increased satisfaction of students and teachers). However, Otto questioned the degree of control of variables in much of the research.

Two analyses of research published in 1960 provide contradictory findings in regard to the research. Goodlad (1960, p.224) suggested that the "evidence slightly favors ability grouping in regard to academic achievement, with dull children seeming to profit more than bright children." In contrary to Goodlad, the Research Committee of the Indiana Association for the Supervision and Curriculum Development (1960)

proposed the idea that ability grouping in elementary school may be harmful to students in the middle and lower groups. Goldberg, Passow, and Justman, in their 1966 book entitled The Effects of Ability Grouping, state that the findings regarding ability grouping (as inconclusive as they were) were not being used to resolve issues relating to instructional practices. They state, "Insufficient and conflicting data are being used to support partisan views concerning the consequences of grouping rather than to resolve the persistent issues (Goldberg, Passow, & Justman, 1966, p.21)."

According to Rowan & Miracle (1982), consistent findings regarding the effects of ability grouping began to emerge in the 1970s. This is partially attributed to the improvement of research designs. Researchers began to study the differences between groups within one grouping system instead of comparing averages of achievement data between schools.

Researchers (in the fields of education, psychology, and other social sciences) in the 1970s found evidence to support differential instruction among different groups. It was suggested that teachers treat students in the higher ability groups more favorably than students in the lower ability groups (Brophy & Good, 1970; Rist, 1973; Barr & Dreeben, 1977). This differential treatment was assumed to contribute to an achievement differential between the groups. Two critical studies published in the 1970s (Alexander & McDill, 1976; Weinstein, 1976) indicated that the inequality between the groups in achievement levels increases over time. In addition, the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy gained careful attention from educational researchers as well as psychologists during the 1970s.

During the 1980s, there was increased attention on whole language philosophy and qualitative research designs in education. Surprisingly,

although ability grouping was widely practiced, there is not an abundance of conclusive research studies in this area (Slavin, 1987a).

The practice of ability grouping also has a long history in education. Although an attempt at controlled experimental research of ability grouping was not attempted until 1916 (Goldberg, Passow, & Justman, 1966), the practice of ability grouping for instruction dates back to 1867. In 1867, in St. Louis, W. T. Harris's plan for promoting "bright" students became one of the first systematic attempts at homogeneous grouping. Several other programs (Elizabeth, New Jersey - 1886; Cambridge, Massachusetts - 1891; Santa Barbara, California - 1898) which segregated students of different academic abilities arose in the late 1800s (Passow, 1962).

The peak of ability grouping in the schools took place during the 1920s (Goldberg, Passow, & Justman, 1966; Thelen, 1967). This increase in practice coincides with a peak in research studies in this area during the 1920s. In addition, this increase "coincides with the introduction of intelligence tests into the schools (Thelen, 1967, p.24)."

By 1929, two-thirds of all elementary schools (with enrollment of 2500 - 25,000 students) reported the use of ability grouping in classrooms (Thelen, 1967). Research published by Harap in 1936 indicated that ability grouping was the most common way of organizing for instruction in order to adjust for individual differences. However, by the late 1930s, the practice of ability grouping decreased sharply but rose again in the 1950s with the rise of the Cold War.

According to Thelen (1967, p.3), "There is a close connection between the state of affairs in the larger society of the community and even of the school." This can be observed in the effects of the Russian launching

of Sputnik in 1957 on the curriculum and instruction in American schools. The shock of the Russian scientific breakthrough led to the establishment of national curriculum committees (Thelen, 1967). These committees proposed the use of ability grouping to increase achievement in different subject areas.

The use of ability grouping as an instructional practice continued to be the norm in elementary schools across the nation throughout the 1960s. In 1963, Austin and Morrison estimated that close to 80 percent of elementary classrooms used ability grouping within the classroom for reading instruction. This coincides with the wide use of structured basal reading programs. According to Hiebert (1983) and Barr and Dreeben (1991), ability grouping in reading instruction continued to endure as an instructional practice in the 1970s and 1980s. This is surprising in light of the rise of whole language philosophy, which steers teachers away from set ability grouping. Despite the pervasive nature of the practice, quality research on ability grouping in reading during the 1980s is sparse (Slavin, 1987a). (This remains true in the 1990s.) According to Slavin (1987a, p.317), "The lack of studies of grouping in reading is surprising. It may be that (ability grouping for reading instruction) is so widespread in elementary schools that formation of ungrouped control groups is difficult to arrange, even on an experimental basis."

The work in this area, however, did not end in the 1980s. Current research and practice, as well as an analysis of the influence of the balanced literacy approach on ability grouping, will be examined in the next section of this paper.

Issues, Controversies, Programs, and Contributors

Issues Relating to the Balanced Literacy Approach

There are several issues surrounding the balanced literacy approach. These include the instruction of skills, the compatibility of the guided reading component with whole language philosophy, and classroom management.

In a balanced literacy program, reading skills are taught in the context of authentic reading and writing activities. According to Rigby (1989, p.3), "The skills of literacy are developed, practiced and reinforced **in the context of actual reading**." Activities in which children acquire literacy skills in a balanced literacy program include read aloud, shared reading, independent (silent) reading, guided reading, shared writing, children writing, and sharing responses (Batzle, 1994; Davidson, 1990; Mooney, 1990). Teaching skills in context is a change from the basal programs of teaching isolated skills directly and in a specific sequence.

In a balanced literacy program, the three cueing systems are central in reading instruction. The cueing systems include semantic (knowledge and experience), graphophonic (letter/sound relationships), and syntactic (the structure of language). (See Appendix C). The goal in a balanced literacy approach is to teach children strategies to develop all three cueing systems in order to encourage reading for meaning (Davidson, 1990). Guided reading is one of the key components for developing the cueing systems.

The guided reading component of the balanced literacy approach is the component that is not an activity supported explicitly by whole language proponents (Goodman, 1986). The creation of ability groups for this component of the program becomes an issue in the whole language classroom.

Management is a central issue in a balanced literacy classroom. The components of the program require that children work independently, with other children, and directly with the teacher. The teacher in the balanced literacy classroom must set clear guidelines for students who are reading and writing independently while he or she conducts a guided reading group. As a result, the issue of on task student behavior arises.

Assessment of literacy within this program is also a management issue. Teachers using this approach typically compile student portfolios and assess student reading individually and authentically (Batzle, 1994). The act of assessment and the management of the paperwork involved is time consuming. This is a change from the basal reading tests that were administered to the whole class (Goodman et al., 1988).

Issues Relating to Ability Grouping

There are several major issues relating to ability grouping for reading instruction. These include student self-concept, student achievement (both short- and long-term), differences in instruction between groups, criteria for group placement, classroom management, and the socioeconomic and cultural representation in various groups within the classroom.

Several researchers contend that students in the low and average achieving groups tend to have a lower self-concept (Anderson et al., 1985;

Morgan, 1989; Oakes, 1985; Trimble & Sinclair, 1987). This may affect student performance in reading due to the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy (Rowan, 1982). Students may feel that because they were placed in the low group, they must be poor readers and, thus, perform as such. In addition to lowered self-esteem in the low and middle groups, there is literature that indicates that students in the higher group tend to develop an inflated sense of self and of their abilities (Hiebert & Fisher, 1990).

The issue of student achievement is a major theme in the research and literature. In theory, ability grouping for reading instruction is done in an attempt to increase student achievement. Research suggests that ability grouping does not lead to overall gains in reading achievement (Harris & Harrison, 1988; Pallas et al., 1994; Slavin, 1987a). Slight gains in the higher group have been identified (Harris & Harrison, 1988). According to Harris and Harrison (1988), however, the slight increase in student achievement in the high group is not worth the negative effects of ability grouping on the low group. Oakes (1986, p.17) criticizes ability grouping for "buying the achievement of a few at the expense of many."

The gap between the achievement of the low and high groups (whether initially caused by the ability grouping or not) tends to widen over time. Oakes and Lipton (1990) suggest that placing children into rigid ability groups can have the potential to guide students into long-term success or failure. This is exacerbated by the fact that students are often placed in the same level of ability group year after year.

Another issue relating to ability grouping is the difference in instruction between the groups. Several research studies have addressed the significant differences in instruction received by the low and high groups (Dreeben & Barr, 1988; Jenkins et al., 1994; Sorensen & Hallinan,

1986). According to Jenkins et al. (1994, p.345), these differences in instruction are "not entirely a surprise given the reasons for creating these groups in the first place." Dreeben and Barr (1988) directly measured reading instruction in classrooms using ability grouping. They concluded that ability grouping in the classroom has "substantial effects" on reading achievement because it effects the quantity and quality of instruction.

The issue of quality of instruction within the groups is related to the issue of opportunities for learning from the reading instruction. The behaviors within a particular group can affect the learning in the group. According to Imai et al. (1992), children in high groups tend to encourage other group members to pay attention whereas children in the low group often distract one another. In addition, teachers tend to tolerate more distractions in the low group than in the high group.

Sorensen and Hallinan (1986) found that children in low ability groups receive fewer learning opportunities than their peers in higher groups. In addition, students in the low group tend to spend less time in reading instruction, are generally exposed to fewer types of materials, and tend to receive instruction which is focused on decoding skills rather than the derivation of meaning from a text (Au & Mason, 1985; Collins, 1986; Durkin, 1989; Hiebert, 1983; Trimble & Sinclair, 1987). Juel (1990, p.233) found that group placement of students having already acquired initial reading skills can "adversely affect reading development" if group placement constrains exposure to a variety of texts.

The criteria for group placement is another crucial issue in the research on ability grouping. Several questions arise in relation to the placement of children into reading groups. First, placement of children has not been found to be consistent with the intended purpose of ability

grouping (to form groups homogeneous in reading ability) (Pallas et al., 1994; Wesson, Vierthaler, & Haubrich, 1989). Pallas et al. (1994) provides evidence that children with similar academic abilities are represented among all three reading groups in one classroom. This indicates that reading groups are sometimes not true "ability" groups.

Anderson et al. (1985) suggest that teachers may unknowingly compose within-class ability groups on the basis of noncognitive characteristics including student effort, attention, and cooperation. Haller and Waterman (1985) found that, while reading ability was the most important factor teachers considered when placing students into groups, factors such as students' general capacity to complete academic tasks, work habits, classroom behavior, personality, and home environment also played a role in group assignment.

Another major issue in ability grouping is that of classroom management. Worthington (1991) states that ability grouping has traditionally been a way of managing the classroom for reading instruction. While the instruction of the group with the teacher has already been addressed, the issue concerning activities of the children not working with the teacher needs to be examined. A study published by Anderson, Brubaker, Alleman-Brooks and Duffy (1985) questioned the quality of seatwork students engaged in when not working with the teacher. Rote activities, such as fill-in-the-blank worksheets, have been questioned in light of whole language philosophies. Proponents of the balanced literacy approach provide alternatives to traditional seatwork (while the teacher is conducting a guided reading group) which are in line with the whole language philosophy.

The issue of the proportion of students of low socioeconomic status and from certain cultural backgrounds in the low reading groups is closely linked with the issue of equity in education. Haller and Waterman (1985, p.772) state that "virtually every sociological study of the procedure [ability grouping in reading] has found that poor and minority pupils are *substantially overrepresented* in the lower ability groups." In his review of the research surrounding ability grouping, Slavin (1987a) comments on the disproportionate numbers of low socioeconomic status, African American, and Hispanic students in the lower ability groups. While students of low socioeconomic status tend to be overrepresented in lower ability groups, Haller and Davis (1980 and 1981) suggest that socioeconomic status is not a factor in intial group assignment.

The major issue in this paper is the applicability of the research on ability grouping to the balanced literacy approach. The areas of balanced literacy and ability grouping research will be analyzed and synthesized in depth the subsequent section of this paper to provide a basis for conclusions regarding this topic.

Controversies

Several controversies relating to balanced literacy and ability grouping are evident within the discussion of the issues. These include skills instruction, management, compatibility with whole language, as well as the affective factors, academic factors, and demographic factors relating to ability grouping. The main controversy relating to the balanced literacy approach revolves around grouping for guided reading. If ability grouping has been shown to have negative effects on children, how can the

guided reading component of balanced literacy be an effective, positive way to teach reading? This controversy is evident in the synthesis of the two ideas (ability grouping and balanced literacy), however, it is not directly examined in the research and literature.

The main controversy within the area of ability grouping, not discussed among the issues, is the discrepancy between research and practice. No major studies have found overall positive effects for this practice. Yet, according to Slavin (1987a), ability grouping for reading instruction remained a common practice as of the year of publication of his article. Researchers in the early 1990s were still conducting studies (although not as many as in the 1970s and 1980s) on ability grouping in traditional ability grouped instruction (Hollingsworth & Harrison, 1991; Taylor et al., 1992). This suggests that, despite the strong support of whole language, there are classroom teachers which continue to use the traditional approach to teaching reading with ability groups and basal readers, despite the research which is against ability grouping.

Programs and Contributors for the Balanced Literacy Approach

The main contributors for the balanced literacy approach include Don Holdaway (1979), the New Zealand Department of Education, Margaret Mooney (1990), Janine Batzle (1994), Rigby (1989), and Wright Group (1994). Rigby and Wright Group also publish sets of literature to use in the balanced literacy approach.

Don Holdaway is an important initial contributor to the balanced literacy approach. Holdaway's work with the shared-book experience, language experience, and the developmental model of literacy instruction

provides much of the basis for balanced literacy. His work, and the work of others in the developmental approach to literacy and the whole language movement, was supported by the New Zealand Department of Education. According to Holdaway (1979, p.8), "The New Zealand Department of Education encouraged and supported these movements, providing opportunities for grass-roots research and development and providing the resources for massive in-service re-education of teachers...". The New Zealand Department of Education also commissioned and adopted the Ready to Read series (1983) and encouraged teachers to teach the components of balanced literacy (Mooney, 1990).

Margaret Mooney, also a New Zealand educator, is a main contributor with her book, Reading To, With, and By Children (1990). In her book, Mooney provides a rationale for and thorough discussion of the components of guided reading, reading aloud, shared reading, independent reading, and student response.

Janine Batzle is an educational consultant for the balanced literacy approach. She conducts teacher in-service training for school districts in Southern California. In addition, she has authored a book on portfolio assessment (1992) and a video on guided reading (Batzle, 1995). At the date of this writing, Batzle is authoring a book devoted solely to guided reading.

Rigby (1989) and Wright Group (1994) contribute to the balanced literacy approach through providing sets of literature to use with the program. Sets of literature include big books for shared reading, small sets of books for guided reading and independent reading, and books with cassette tapes for listening centers. The titles are leveled by developmental reading level and relate to different areas of the curriculum. Rigby has

strong science themes in its literature sets. Both companies provide detailed teachers' guides which provide information about the components of a balanced literacy program.

Programs and Contributors for Ability Grouping in Reading Instruction

The two main types of programs that use ability grouping are traditional basal programs and the balanced literacy programs. There are differences between the type and purpose for grouping among these two programs. This will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section of this paper.

The major contributors to the research and literature on ability grouping are Robert Slavin and Elfrieda Hiebert. Elfrieda Hiebert is one of the authors of the prominent publication Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985). This book challenged many of the traditional practices in reading instruction, including ability grouping. Some of her work involves the discussion and analysis of the state of the research on ability grouping (1983, 1990). In 1992, she conducted research on the reading and writing ability of students in a balanced literacy program which included ability grouping for guided reading (Hiebert, Colt, Catto, & Gury, 1992). One of her most recent publications is a book dealing with authentic reading assessment (Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994).

Robert Slavin is a main contributor with his widely referenced meta-analysis of research on ability grouping (1987a). In his meta-analysis of the research, Slavin concluded that within-class ability grouping is not supported by research, however, between-class grouping across grade levels can increase student achievement in some subject areas, including

reading. This meta-analysis was supported by the meta-analytic research of Kulik and Kulik (1987). Slavin has extensively investigated ability grouping in the context of reading and mathematics instruction. In addition, he has studied the factors involved in individualized, whole class, and small group instruction (Slavin & Karweit, 1985).

Synthesis and Analysis

The previous sections of this paper have dealt with the history and current state of the research and practice of ability grouping in traditional reading instruction and the literature pertaining to the balanced literacy approach. In this section, a review of what the research and literature affirms about both areas and the relationship between them will be presented.

The research and literature on ability grouping is abundant in the area of traditional, skills-based reading instruction in the 1970s and 1980s (Anderson, Brubaker, Alleman-Brooks, & Duffy, 1985; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkerson, 1985; Au & Mason, 1985; Barr & Dreeben, 1977, 1988; Brophy & Good, 1970; Dreeben & Barr, 1988; Eder, 1983; Felmlee & Eder, 1983; Haller & Waterman, 1985; Hiebert, 1983; Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1987a, Sorenson & Hallinan, 1986; Weinstein, 1976). The type of ability group studied by most researchers in those decades was permanent and inflexible. Margaret Mooney (1990) asserts that guided reading within a balanced literacy program is not comparable to traditional, grouped reading instruction. She states, "Guided reading is not a new name for instructional reading or any other form of group teaching or work with a basal. There are major differences in the intent and techniques between guided reading and the more traditional "teaching" methods (1990, p.46)".

The research of ability grouping can be classified according to the common themes in research focus. These include student achievement (Hollingsworth & Harrison, 1991; Sorensen & Hallinan, 1986), self-concept (Eder, 1983; Rowan & Miracle, 1982), and instruction (Brophy & Good, 1970). The research can be further classified according to its study

of educational (academic) outcomes or psychological/sociological (affective domain) phenomena. Research can also be classified according to its concentration on student behavior (Anderson et al., 1985; Eder, 1983; Felmlee & Eder, 1983; Sorenson & Hallinan, 1986) or teacher behavior (Brophy & Good, 1970; Dewalt, Rhyne-Winkler, & Rubel, 1993; Haller & Waterman, 1985; Weinstein, 1979). While there is much research on traditional grouping, current research is severely lacking in the area of flexible grouping used for one part of the reading program (such as guided reading in the balanced literacy approach).

Although research has not proven conclusive in all the issues regarding ability grouping, the research tends to agree on the negative effects of ability grouping in traditional reading instruction, except in a few cases. One such case involves the question of organization versus instruction. While several studies attribute the negative effects to the actual existence of grouping in the classroom and the factors relating to grouping (Eder, 1983; Rowan & Miracle, 1982), Barr and Dreeben (1988) suggest that the *existence of grouping* itself does not have a negative effect on low-achieving students. They found that the success of the low-achieving students depended on the quality of instruction, not the actual organization for instruction.

Several studies relating to ability grouping provide suggestions for alternatives to the traditional, fixed grouping. These suggestions support the basic tenets of guided reading within a balanced literacy program. Nelson (1994) suggests that groups be organized for a specific purpose, such as to provide developmental instruction in reading. Worthington (1991,p.7) asserts, "There is a great need for balance across classroom grouping arrangements and not a wholesale abandonment of small group

instruction...". One suggestion Worthington presents is that of heterogeneous groups working at learning centers. This is in agreement with the balanced literacy approach using centers for independent work proposed by Janine Batzle (1994).

The literature relating to balanced literacy is abundant in the form of professional books (Batzle, 1994; Mooney, 1990) and teacher's guides that accompany the literature sets (Davidson, 1990; Rigby, 1989; Wright Group, 1994). Qualitative research in this area has been conducted in New Zealand but is difficult to gain access to. Several case studies have been conducted in the United States, but empirical research is lacking.

Literature describing the components of a balanced literacy program can be classified as originating from New Zealand (Davidson, 1990; Mooney, 1990; Rigby, 1989) or from the American whole language movement (Routman, 1991). Literature can also be classified according to the intention with which it is written - professional books written to guide literacy instruction (Mooney, 1990; Routman, 1991) or teacher's guides which promote the use of a specific set of published materials (Davidson, 1990; Rigby, 1989; Wright Group, 1994).

The research and literature (Goodman, 1986; Klesius, Griffith, & Zielonka, 1990; Routman, 1991) supporting the whole language approach is the closest applicable justification for balanced literacy instruction. According to the quantitative research of Klesius, Griffith, and Zielonka (1990), whole language instruction provides gains that are at least equal to traditional skills-based instruction. This is supported by the findings of Bastolla (1994) in her comparison of whole language and basal instruction. Since the whole language approach is in line with current research on how children learn, is as effective as basal programs in producing literate

children, and supports the goals of a child-centered, thinking curriculum, it can be inferred that whole language is a desirable approach to literacy instruction.

The major difference between whole language and balanced literacy lies in the practice of ability grouping for guided reading (not supported by Kenneth Goodman, leader in whole language philosophy). However, the purpose of guided reading is to individualize reading instruction using meaningful and authentic experiences, which is actually in line with whole language. Regie Routman (1991) proposes a balanced literacy program (and uses it synonymously with the whole language approach). While Routman (1991, p.38) regards guided reading as "the heart of the instructional reading program", she expresses her belief against using homogeneous groups, except in the first part of first grade when children are beginning to acquire early reading skills. This disagreement between the use of guided reading in a whole language/balanced literacy program can be confusing. There are also slight differences among the guided reading approaches in balanced literacy programs from the publishers of the literature sets (Davidson-for Rigby, 1990; Wright Group, 1994). While Rigby proposes that students have the books in their hands from the first minute of guided reading (to put as much control over reading into the hands of the readers), Wright Group proposes talking through the teacher-held book before students are given a copy of the text to read. Margaret Mooney (1990) and Janine Batzle (1994) support Rigby's approach.

While the research is lacking, there is research and literature (from those other than the leaders in whole language and balanced literacy) that supports the components of a balanced literacy program. Mark Keppel

Elementary School in Paramount, California has experienced success with a balanced literacy program in the context of a bilingual program (L.A. County Case Studies Program, 1993). In Colorado, Hiebert (a major contributor to ability grouping research), Colt, Catto, & Gury (1992) investigated the effects of a balanced literacy program in a restructured Chapter 1 program. The results of their quantitative study indicated positive effects of such a program on the reading and writing development of first-grade students. The research does not present details, however, of exactly how the guided reading was structured. It is interesting that both of the studies were conducted with at-risk student populations.

The research and literature suggests that balanced literacy is a desirable instructional practice, however, it does not provide conclusive evidence that it will have the same effect on the literacy rate in the United States as balanced literacy has effected the literacy rate in New Zealand. According to Don Holdaway (1979), the New Zealand government supported the tenets of whole language and balanced literacy. He states, "Perhaps only in a country the size of New Zealand could such a set of facilitating conditions be created and sustained through all parts of the system in a spirit of fraternity and genuine commitment to children (p.8)." The result today is one of the highest literacy rates in the world. With the state-controlled educational system of the United States, the possibility of replicating New Zealand's success in literacy is a timely topic for research.

Conclusions

As a result of this author's review of the literature regarding ability grouping and the balanced literacy approach, several conclusions can be reached.

First, there is not adequate evidence to apply all of the findings of research on ability grouping in traditional classrooms to the type of ability grouping used in a balanced literacy approach. The differences in the reading instruction and the curricular goals among the traditional classrooms and balanced literacy classrooms render the research on ability grouping as limited in applicability to balanced literacy classrooms. However, the findings of ability grouping research relating to self-esteem and differential instruction between groups can be used as a reminder to teachers in the way in which groups should be dealt with in the balanced literacy classroom.

Second, although Kenneth Goodman (1986) is theoretically against ability grouping for reading instruction, the balanced literacy approach (although using ability grouping as one instructional strategy) appears to be in line with whole language philosophies. Since whole language strategies have been supported by research and balanced literacy is basically whole language with an additional component, it can be concluded that balanced literacy is, at the very least, a practice worthy of experimentation in an elementary classroom. If the effects of rigid ability grouping provide a frame of reference for the handling of grouping, guided reading groups can be, at the very least a neutral, if not positive, strategy in the overall reading program.

It can be concluded that the implementation of a balanced literacy program involves risks for the teacher and the students. Traditional skills-

based reading programs left the control over what was "learned" to the teacher, or more accurately, the basal program (Goodman et al., 1988). Groups were usually permanent, regardless of individual student development in reading. A balanced literacy classroom, on the other hand, employs flexible grouping for guided reading. This gives control to the children to determine group membership through reading development.

In a balanced literacy classroom, teachers may feel they are taking a risk with the possibility of students being off-task during the time the teacher is conducting a guided reading group. Students need to be encouraged to take risks in directing their own learning and relying on cooperative groups. Overdependence on the teacher for direction throughout every activity is not practical in a balanced literacy classroom. Teachers must spend ample time preparing students to rely on their knowledge and the knowledge of other students for some activities.

Lastly, it can be concluded that a balanced literacy approach, when implemented in its ideal form, takes a large portion of the instructional day. With a crowded elementary curriculum, this raises the concern of educators who fear that all required content will not be covered. However, with the continued push for integration of curricular areas (California Department of Education, 1992), the components of a balanced literacy program can be meaningfully linked to content areas. Janine Batzle (1994) supports the integration of content areas within balanced literacy components through the use of theme cycles. This becomes crucial in an upper elementary classroom in which the teacher is responsible for a great deal of content in comparison to the primary grades.

Recommendations

As a result of the author's research and review of the literature pertaining to ability grouping and the balanced literacy approach, several recommendations can be made. These recommendations are for teachers, administrators, parents, school districts, state educational agencies, private agencies, publishers, future researchers, and society in general.

It is this author's recommendation that teachers at all levels prioritize literacy. Teachers should organize reading instruction with the goals of whole language and balanced literacy in mind. Grouping for guided reading in the elementary school should remain flexible. This flexibility in grouping is emphasized in the recent Framework in Focus (California Department of Education, 1994). The homogenous groups should not be named, as this would give them an appearance of permanence. Teachers should make a concerted effort to provide all guided reading groups with quality instruction, a challenging pace, and an environment which builds each child's sense of self-worth as a reader and writer.

One way of organizing for a balanced literacy program, which is recommended by this author, involves heterogeneous grouping, homogeneous grouping, whole class, and individual instruction which supports literacy (See Appendix D). In the balanced literacy program in the author's classroom (based on the model by Janine Batzle), students rotate through learning centers in heterogeneous groups (See Appendix E). While at the centers, the teacher calls students who are at similar levels of reading development (usually from various center groups within the classroom) to the rug to participate in guided reading. When each student returns to his or her center group, the group is responsible to update the

student on work that was completed while he or she was working with the teacher.

Typical centers in the author's third grade classroom include: *Computer* (Researching topics on the CD-ROM encyclopedia "First Connections"), *Library* (Silent reading and partner reading in the classroom library), *Listening Center* (Books with cassette tapes), *Letter writing* (Students work on letters to be mailed or delivered to others), *CAT Test Practice* (Students complete practice exercises for the standardized test to be given in April), *Math Center* (Students participate in problem solving activities and reinforce math skills), *Spelling Center* (Students quiz each other on the week's spelling words), *Art Center* (Students use a variety of materials to create responses to literature and/or functional items), and *Map Center* (Students reinforce map skills). Types of centers chosen for a balanced literacy classroom should depend on the needs of the students. Centers in a classroom where the majority of students are learning to read will be different than centers in a "Reading to Learn" (Batzle, 1994) classroom. The students in the author's classroom represent emergent, early, and fluent readers. While some are learning to read, most are reading to learn. Therefore, the centers chosen are geared to an early level of reading to learn. See Appendix F for suggested centers for both types of classrooms.

Teachers can work with two to three guided reading groups per day, depending on the needs of the students. Besides working with guided reading groups, individual students are assessed in reading using a running record (See Appendix G). The whole class meets together at the beginning of the reading/centers time and at the end. During this time, the students experience shared reading, read aloud, and sharing of responses. This is an

opportune time to integrate curricular areas through choice of literature.

Students also participate in Writing Workshop (which includes whole class and individual instruction in the writing process). Writing Workshop is a daily block of time committed to student writing. The class meets together for a mini-lesson which focuses on a writing skill or strategy. After the mini-lesson, the students work through the stages of the writing process. A crucial premise of Writing Workshop is that students choose their own topics. While students are writing, the teacher conducts individual or small group conferences to guide students through the writing process. Students meet at the end of the hour to share work in progress and celebrate published work.

Content areas such as science, social studies, mathematics, and art should be integrated into the reading and writing in the balanced literacy classroom. Scheduling to cover all curricular areas in the balanced literacy classroom can be difficult due to the block of time needed for reading and writing. Appendix H presents a sample schedule for a third grade balanced literacy classroom.

Before implementing a balanced literacy program, teachers should reflect upon the current instruction in language arts and the needs of the students. It is recommended that teachers implement one component at a time until the routines involved are mastered by the teacher and the students. If whole language strategies, such as shared reading and the writing process, are already in place, simple centers can be introduced. Once centers are functioning smoothly, guided reading can be introduced. This author recommends starting guided reading groups only after the students are familiar with working at centers and behavioral expectations.

Teachers should also engage in self-assessment in reading instruction in order to reflect upon their own beliefs and envoke change in practices. Materials and training are important factors in the quality of instruction in this approach, however, teacher reflection is crucial in its success. This reflection in belief and practice is supported by the research of Olson and Singer (1994).

Teachers implementing a balanced literacy program should meet regularly with other teachers who are at the same stage in implementation and others with a well-established program in order to gain peer support and a network of successful ideas. Teachers should realize that the implementation of this approach is a process, synonymous to the processes of reading and writing. Ample time should be taken to reflect upon, revise, correct, and share the state of the implementation.

Administrators should establish ongoing in-service training in the balanced literacy approach. Through the in-service training, teachers need to learn theories supporting the practice and have opportunities to rehearse and reflect upon successful teacher behaviors in a balanced literacy classroom. In addition, teachers should be given release time to observe classrooms with similar student populations (at the school site and at other school sites) where balanced literacy programs are established and successful. Administrators should also evaluate schoolwide educational goals and mission statement to assess the degree to which the school's program supports the tenets of the balanced literacy approach. The practice of appropriate ability grouping within the guided reading component should be articulated to all staff members. Furthermore, parent education workshops dealing with ways parents can foster literacy development at home should be offered by the school.

According to It's Elementary!: Elementary Grades Task Force Report (California Department of Education, 1992, p.81), "Unfortunately, parental involvement remains a largely underutilized resource in promoting improved learning outcomes." Administrators and teachers should work together to encourage parents to support the literacy development of their children through school and home programs. The school should educate each parent on its comprehensive vision for literacy. Opportunities for parental involvement in the classroom, in the home, and for special school literacy events should be fostered.

Parents (and other family members) should reflect upon the literacy development of their children and take advantage of opportunities (at home and at school) to become more involved in the literacy of their children. In addition, parents should model literate behaviors at home to act as models of literate adults to their children. A wide variety of reading materials (fiction, periodicals, reference materials at both the child's level and the adult's level) should be accessible throughout the home. In addition, writing utensils and paper should be available and used for authentic purposes at home (letters to family, grocery lists, journals, etc.).

School districts and state educational agencies should provide more intensive training in the balanced literacy approach. District funds and grant money should be used for the generous purchase of literature (both the literature sets for guided reading and a wide variety of other literature for the classroom) to be utilized in a balanced literacy classroom. One of the major barriers to implementing this program in the author's school is the lack of materials for guided reading. It should be noted that materials should be thoroughly examined for the presentation of racial stereotypes (Strech, 1994) or any form of sexism, ageism, and the like.

It is the recommendation of this author that school districts examine their systems of assessment in light of the current state of literacy instruction. Districts that employ standardized testing which focus on isolated skills should reflect upon the goals for students literacy and the appropriateness of authentic assessment. Teachers should be encouraged to utilize running records and portfolio assessment. Progress reports should be modified to allow a narrative assessment of curricular areas dealing with processes such as reading, writing, and spelling. It is the opinion of this author that concrete letter grades in these areas are not appropriate in light of the developmental process of literacy.

Private agencies supporting education through grants should provide more generous grants to support literacy. While it is important to continue to offer grants for the development of mathematics and science (areas that are typically seen as weak in the United States in relation to other countries in the world), more grant money needs to be allocated to literacy. Without strong skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, talented mathematicians and scientists cannot communicate effectively. Without effective communication in these areas, the impact of significant breakthroughs are limited.

This author recommends that publishers produce a wide variety of books (fiction and non-fiction) for use within a balanced literacy classroom which present concepts from every curricular area. Books written for different levels of readers should be of similar quality and of high-interest to children. Children in the lower-level guided reading groups should feel that the book they are reading is as exciting as the books other groups are reading. In addition, publishers should refuse to publish books that reinforce stereotypes (Strech, 1994).

Future researchers should conduct both quantitative and qualitative research on the specific effects of ability grouping within a balanced literacy classroom. Factors that should be investigated are: the quality of instruction between guided reading groups, the affective factors relating to grouping for guided reading, the academic gains among the different guided reading groups(using both traditional and authentic assessment to compare), and teacher attitudes towards the different guided reading groups within this program. The current lack of research in this area hinders the true potential of the implementation of such a program. Researchers should also conduct studies relating to the overall effects of balanced literacy. Academic achievement, student attitude towards learning, and the classroom environment should be studied. Experimental, cross sectional, and longitudinal research should be conducted with different student populations, including at-risk students, second language learners, and students with special needs.

Lastly, this author believes that society in general should begin to focus more support (financial and otherwise) on education. If schools are to produce students who are successful in today's global economy, society must prioritize education. The advances in the field of education are too often short circuited by lack of confidence and support in the schools. Success in instructional programs should be communicated through the media to improve the public's view of public schools. Citizens should be more involved in the education of the nation's children through wide scale surveys and volunteer opportunities. As the United States begins to support education with more funding, volunteers, and positive attitude, balanced literacy, as well as other quality programs, can be implemented to its full potential.

Appendix A

Suggested Teaching Sequence for Guided Reading

Read The Text

- **Proceed to the title page—reread the title and talk about the illustration. Help children focus on any details in the story-line that will help them make further predictions.**
- **"Talk" the children through the book, page by page, inviting them to talk about what they see in the illustrations.**
- **Focus attention on details that will help children to learn how to cope with the challenges they meet. Have them read samplings of text to confirm their predictions.**
- **Having guided the children to the author's idea, they now read the book independently within the group. The teacher observes and supports as necessary.**

Return To The Text

- **Discuss the story with the children.**
- **Invite individual comments and opinions. Value the children's varied responses.**
- **Have children reread the story in pairs, independently within the group.**
- **Take advantage of the possibilities for teaching reading skills and strategies in the context of the story.**

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Suggested Teaching Sequence For Guided Reading

Respond To The Text

- Listen to the spontaneous responses children make.
- Suggest they talk to a friend about aspects of the story that really interest them.
- Reread all or parts of the book once more. Rereading deepens and extends the children's understanding of the text.
- Demonstrate and facilitate creative responses that extend and complement reading.

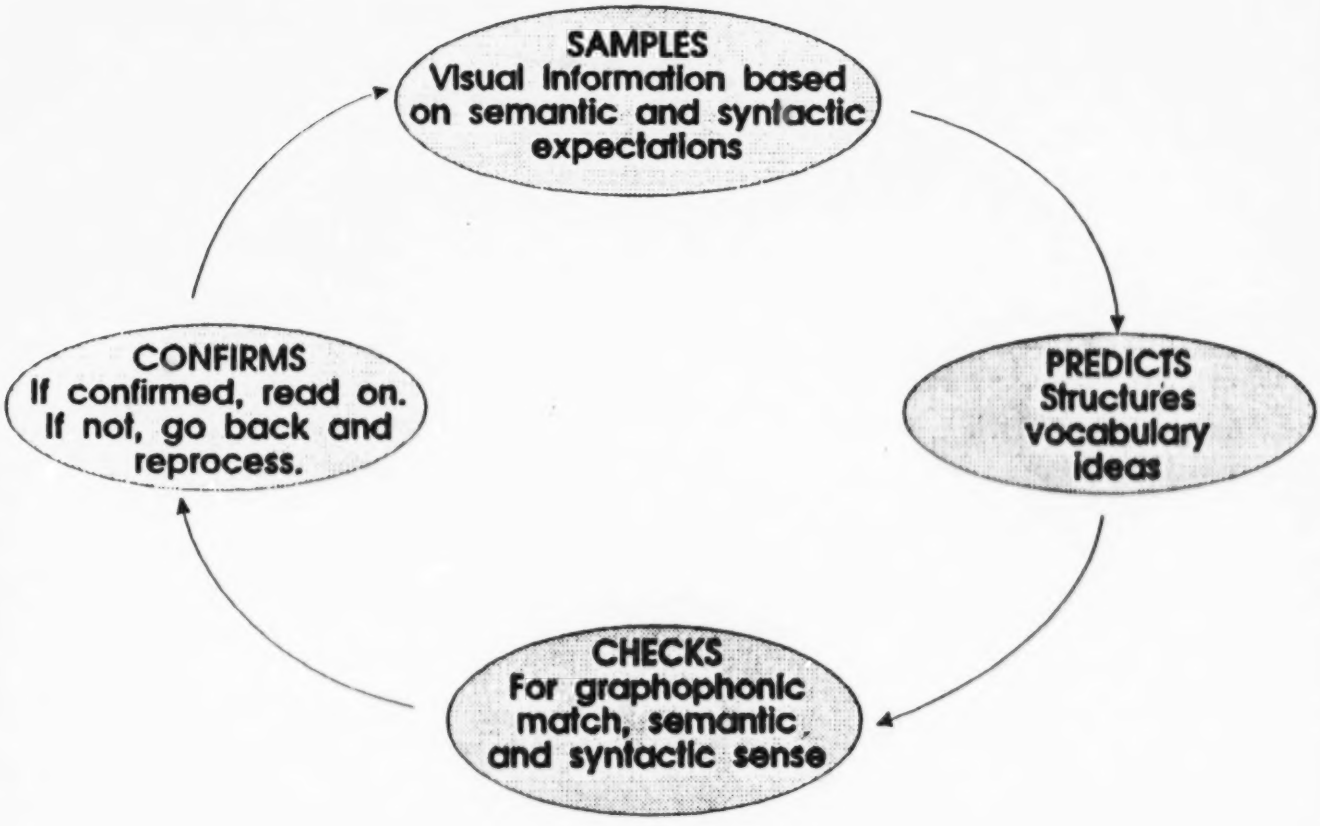
Ways to Respond

- rereading
- writing
- arts and crafts
- dramatization
- let children suggest their own activities

Literacy 2000 • - ONT 19C

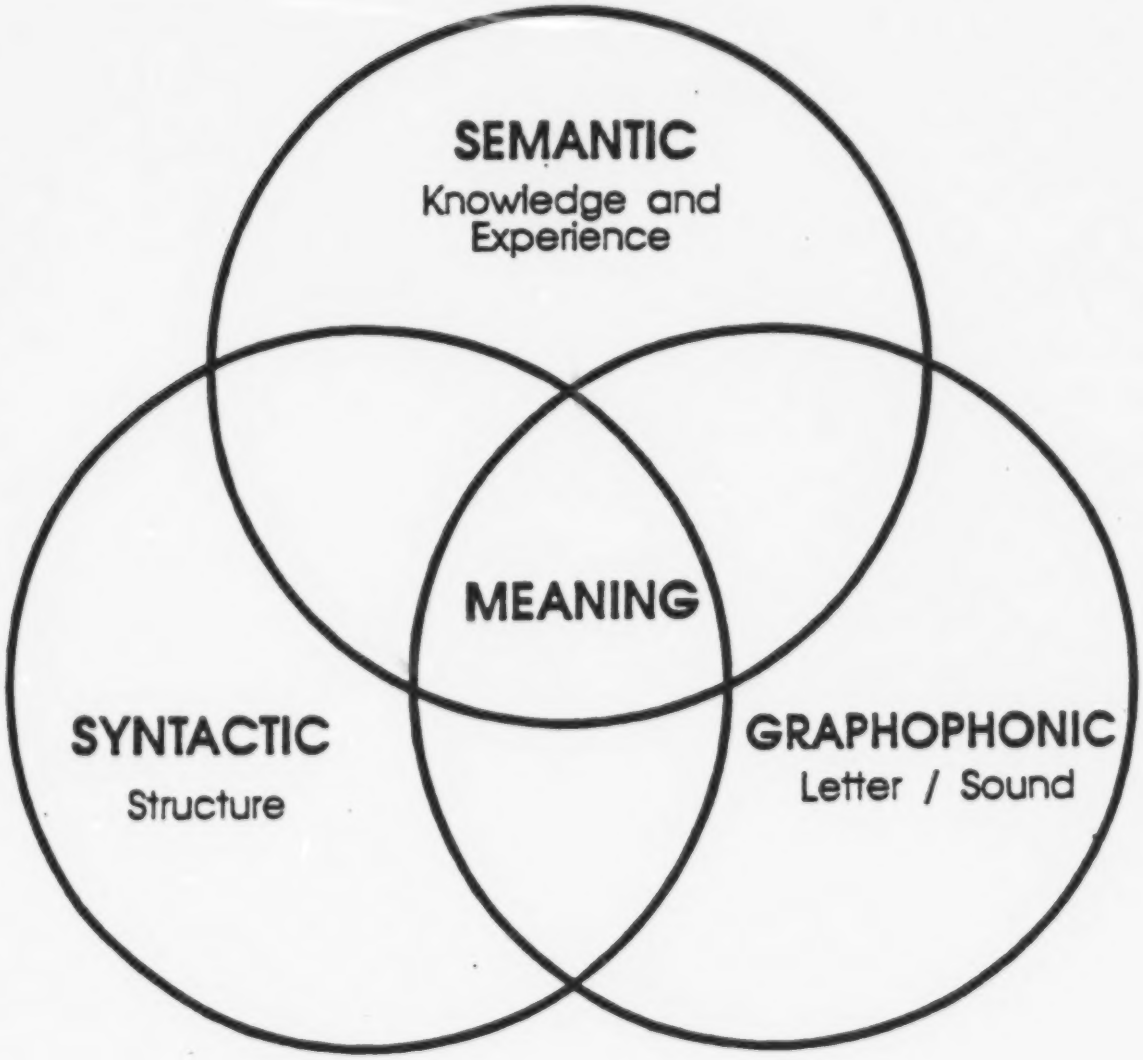
Appendix B

SAMPLE--PREDICT--CHECK--CONFIRM



Appendix C

CUEING SYSTEMS



Appendix D

A FRAMEWORK FOR LITERACY LEARNING

A Balanced Literacy Program

Whole Group Approaches

Purpose: Demonstration/Modeling

Shared Reading

Shared Writing

Small Group Approches

Purpose: Meeting Individual Needs

Guided Reading
Literature Circles

Guided Writing
Conferences

Collaborative Experiences

Purpose: Learning Together and From Each Other
Flexible Grouping Strategies

Heterogeneous Movement
Centers
Projects
Buddy or Paired Work

Homogeneous Group

Small
Group

Independent Experiences

Purpose: Developing Fluency and Competency to Independence

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A Balanced Literacy Program
A Framework for Literacy Learning and Teaching

Children learn to read and write successfully when a balance of instructional approaches to literacy learning is provided. The following approaches provide the framework for the implementation of a balanced literacy program.

Reading Aloud (Reading To)

Reading to children aloud demonstrates the nature of reading as well as the rewards that can be experienced through reading. By reading aloud the genre' of literature, models for writing will be provided.

Shared Reading (Reading With)

Shared reading with enlarged text or whole class copies of literature provides a non-threatening experience which demonstrates the reading process in action. It is a replication of the bedtime story experience with it's intimacy, enjoyment, and curious investigation of books.

Guided Reading (Reading By)

Guided reading provides an opportunity for readers to utilize, develop and further reading strategies by working at the edge of their development. The teacher guides a group of readers with similiar abilities to a successful experience with the text. It is crucial that a text that closely matches the group of readers is used. This is not a choral reading experience, neither is it round-robin reading. Children read for themselves within the group setting either orally or silently depending on the developmental level of the readers. Not only does this provide an opportunity for the teacher to observe readers several times during the week, but it also provides a successful, confirming experience for the readers.

Independent Reading (Reading By)

Independent reading by the children gives them other opportunities to gain confidence in their ability to read successfully. This reading experience gives them an opportunity to develop fluency at the level they are reading. Many teachers provide a block of time for independent reading through O.T.T.E.R. (Our Time To Enjoy Reading) or D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read). Books from a range of levels must be available in the classroom for independent reading. Children will become more and more proficient at selecting books that match their interests and ability.

Responses

Responses are a record of a child's reaction to reading, an indication of what has been comprehended and an expression of the child. Children need time to share their responses with the class. This develops a community of readers and writers, as well as a sense of audience.

Shared Writing

Shared writing provides an opportunity to demonstrate and model what experienced writers do. This writing comes from the children's ideas and experiences and as the teacher writes and children participate orally, many teaching points can be brought out.

Modeled Writing

With this approach, the teacher demonstrates his/her own strategies as a proficient adult writer. Modeled writing involves the teacher writing in front of the children for his/her own purposes. This experience provides children with the teacher's expertise and understanding of the writing process.

Language Experience

Writing down a child's own language develops an understanding of the connection between the spoken and written forms of language. It is, therefore, important to write down exactly what the children say so they can see this connection. Language experience, done both in whole and small groups, provides "friendly" reading material for the classroom .

Children's Writing

Children use their background knowledge and personal experiences to write for meaningful purposes. They will develop their own writing process within a community of authors. The children's writing pieces are published and shared with the class.

Children benefit from particular experiences in different ways and to different degrees. With a balanced literacy program we move away from single approach teaching and provide a broader program which integrates the processes of language. Assessment and evaluation are deeply intertwined with the instruction in this type of classroom. They are a daily, necessary part in guiding instruction.

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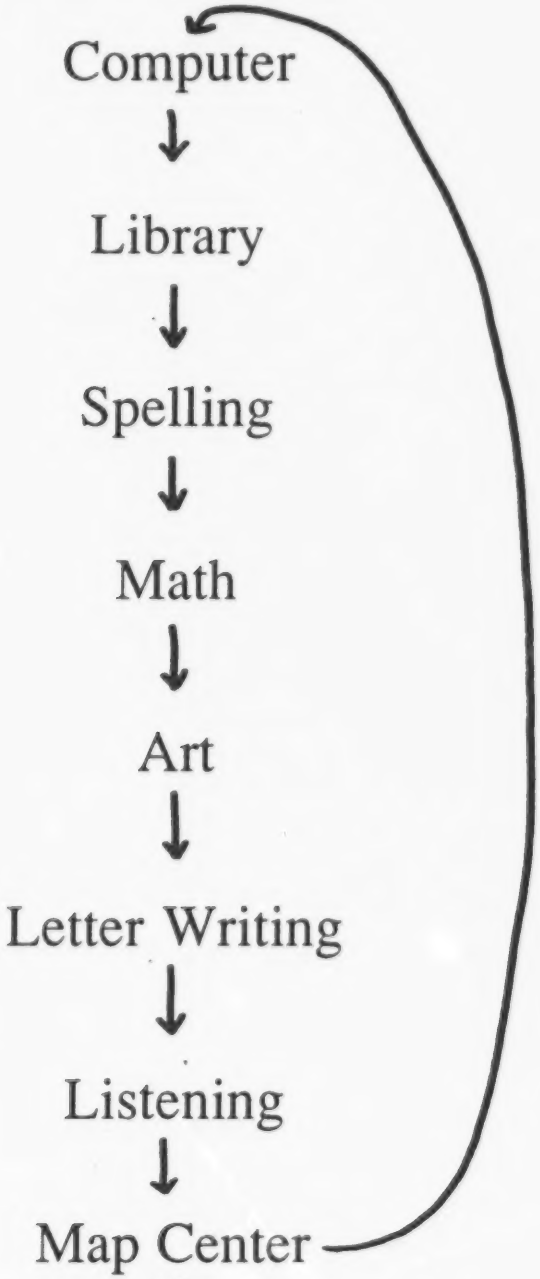
Appendix E

Centers



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Appendix F

Work Areas in a Learning To Read Classroom

Library
- Book Boxes
- Free Reading

Overhead Projector

Read the Room

Listening Center

Writing Center or Post Office

Art Center

Reading Nook
- Big Books
- Poem Box
- Puppets or Flannel Boards
- Chart Stories and Songs

Games
- Magnetic Letters to Spell and Write
- Pocket Chart Activities
- Word Match

Discovery Center

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Work Areas in a Reading to Learn Classroom

Library

- *A central, comfortable place where children and teachers read daily and record their readings in a reading log
- *Individual book boxes developed by interest, theme or ability

Writing Center

- *A place where children participate in a variety of independent writing experiences such as diaries, innovations on language structures, rough draft writing

Art Center

- * A place where children have a variety of materials to choose from to create with
- * A place where students create responses to their reading and writing

Word Work

- *A place to develop a variety of word strategies

Listening/Technology Center

- *A place where students listen to tapes with matching text
- *A place where students utilize technology in a variety to ways

Gradually add content area centers such as . . .

Researchers' Lab

- *A place for active discovery and experimentation
- *A place where scientists record and write about their predictions, observations and conclusions

Researchers' Study

- *A place for digging into resource books such as almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, non-fiction books, current events, manuals, histories, maps and globes, etc.

Musicians' Corner

- * A place to sing songs/poems out of the class songbook, and/or listen to music on tapes, records, etc.

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Appendix G

RUNNING RECORD

DIFFICULTY LEVEL ....

Error Rate	Percent Accuracy
1:200	99.5
1:100	99
1:50	98
1:33	97
1:25	96
1:20	95
1:17	94
1:14	93
1:12.5	92
1:11.75	91
1:10	90
1:9	89
1:8	87.5
1:7	85.5
1:6	83
1:5	80
1:4	75
1:3	66
1:2	50

R.W. = Running Words.
E = Errors.
S.C. = Self-correction

Error Rate.

$$\frac{\text{Running Words}}{\text{Errors}}$$

e.g. $\frac{150}{15}$ = 1:10 Ratio.

Accuracy.

$$100 - \frac{E}{RW} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

$$100 - \frac{15}{150} \times \frac{100}{1}\%$$

= 90%

Easy:
Usually above 95%

Instructional:
approx 90-95%

Hard:
Less than 90%

Good SC rates
1:1 1:2 1:3
1:4 1:5

Self Correction Rate.

$$\frac{E + SC}{SC}$$

$$\frac{15 + 5}{5} = 1:4 \text{ Ratio.}$$

Reference: "The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties." by M. M. Clay.

CONVENTIONS....

Accurate reading marked with a tick (check) ✓

Come ✓ to ✓ my ✓ house ✓.

Record a wrong response with the text under it.

Come ✓ to ✓ my ✓ home / house — Record as 1 error.

No response to a word is recorded with a dash.

Come ✓ to ✓ my ✓ — / house — Record as 1 error.

Insertion of a word is recorded over a dash.

Come ✓ to ✓ my ✓ old / — house ✓. Record as 1 error.

If a child attempts a word several times, record all his attempts.

he / house | here | home — Record as 1 error

When a child successfully corrects an error this is recorded as a self-correction. (SC)

Come ✓ to ✓ my ✓ ~~home~~ / ~~house~~ | Sc.

If a child cannot go on because he is unable to correct an error or because he cannot attempt the next word he is told the word. (T) Score as 1 error.

This ✓ is ✓ my ✓ doll / dog | T

An appeal for help is marked ~~d~~ — / ~~dog~~ | App. Score as 1 error.

When a child becomes confused and gets in a muddle, help him over the difficulty by saying, "Try that again."

[We ✓ ~~ate~~ / are | ~~good~~ / going | to ✓ ~~some~~ / see | ~~I~~ — / John. TTA]

Place square set of brackets around the first set of confused reading, write TTA and count as 1 error.

Begin a fresh record of the problem text.

We ✓ are ✓ ~~good~~ / going | to ✓ see ✓ John ✓. Record as 1 error

Repetition is not counted as an error. (Re-run)

We ✓ are ✓ going ✓ to ✓ see ✓ ~~James~~ / John | R | SC

Re-read more than once.

Here ✓ is ✓ the ✓ R3 teacher ✓.

A pause can be recorded as:- Here ✓ ' is ✓ || the ✓

Child using initial letter to solve. ~~h~~ / ~~house~~ ✓

Appendix H

Daily Schedule

8:45 - 9:00	DEAR (Drop Everything and Read)
9:00 - 9:10	Calendar, Roll, Lunch Count, Flag Salute
9:10 - 10:05	Writing Workshop
10:05 - 10:20	Recess
10:20 - 12:00	Balanced Literacy Reading Program / Centers in Theme Cycles (Science and Social Studies Content Integrated)
12:00 - 12:50	Lunch
12:50 - 1:30	Physical Education and Health (Integration with bilingual class)
1:30 - 1:40	Recess
1:40 - 2:45	Math

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